

EDITORIAL.

It is customary to speak of the botanical work constantly issuing from the German laboratories as representing the highest attainment in botanical activity and accuracy. In a contrast with German botanists, American workers are placed in an inferior position in the estimation of the botanical world. The first statement is undoubtedly true, while the second is no discredit to American botanists, as we desire to show. Botanical activity and botanical ability were never greater in this country than at the present writing. The older botanists add to long lives filled with most enduring work an abiding zeal that associates them with the youngest workers, while an abundance of strong new blood gives promise of a most vigorous development. It is no lack of ability among American botanists that ranks them below their transatlantic brethren, but lack of opportunity, and lack of opportunity comes from lack of equipment. Money-givers and boards of control in this country have no appreciation of the conditions necessary for good botanical work. They think their duty is done when they have employed a man, who is then expected to make bricks without straw. The Botanical Garden at Cambridge, and the noble gift to American botany made by Mr. Shaw of St. Louis, are illustrations of what should become more general. One of the most essential things, and one of the very great advantages of German botanists, is the establishment of a botanical garden. This should be considered the necessary foundation for every botanical position from which original investigation is expected. In fact, the investigator, with his lecture room and laboratories should be considered as a part of the equipment of a botanical garden. It seems to us that this is the imperative need of American botany. It need hardly be said that such an equipment includes the element of time which will make investigation the chief thing and teaching incidental. Our appeal, then, is for friends of American botany to establish botanical gardens, and so endow them that they will not only become seats of botanical investigation, but also inciting causes of similar institutions everywhere.

A CORRESPONDENT of *Science* asks if the trumpet-creeper is poisonous. Such a query might be raised about many plants generally regarded as innocuous. Rhus poisoning is taken as the standard of comparison, in which the virulent effluence is potent enough to affect specially susceptible persons through considerable distance, and a far larger percentage of persons by contact. The most unexpected and harmless plants may be brought into the category. An instance within the writer's knowledge was that of a clear-minded lady of a botany class, who found

the large white lady's-slipper (*Cypripedium spectabile*) a plant to be avoided; and the absurdity of the notion in the opinion of the other members of the class did not in the least change her positive assertion of its poisonous qualities. It would be a curious and, withal, an interesting inquiry to trace up and catalogue such experiences and to investigate the nature of the poisoning, if such it be. The subject has considerable of the indefiniteness and evasiveness of the ghost, haunted-house and mesmeric questions now being investigated by the society for psychical research, and it may be doubted by some if the results of the inquiry would be any more valuable. There is, however, the substantial question of rhus poisoning, whose etiology has not yet been settled, to afford a *point de résistance*, and when that is fully elucidated the more obscure cases may, to some extent, fall easily into place. Even a knowledge of the extent of the subject would have a value.

OPEN LETTERS.

Organized botanical work.

It seems to me no more important suggestion looking to the promotion of the progress of botany in this country has been made than that of Prof. Farlow, in his paper entitled, "The Task of American Botanists," in which he urges that the amateur botanists of America be organized and their work directed. There are hundreds of educated young men and women in this country who are capable of doing something to promote botanical knowledge, some in one branch, some in another, and who are also eager to do it, but they need to be told what to do, what subjects to investigate. They are desirous of working, but do not know where to begin; or, perhaps, in many cases, they are industriously studying a subject which is too large for them, or one which has already been satisfactorily wrought out, so that their work profits none but themselves. In this way the science suffers an immense loss.

Now, it seems to me, a practical scheme might be devised whereby most of this wasted or misapplied talent might be turned into useful channels. Astronomers are organizing for the systematic study of the heavens; why should not the botanical talent of the country be similarly organized for the purpose of furthering botanical research in a systematic manner?

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Crackling sound of *Utricularia*.

I write to ask an explanation of the distinct crackling sound produced by *Utricularia vulgaris* when it is disturbed. I had for some time supposed it was to be heard only from fronds removed from the water and beginning to dry, but I find the same phenomenon when the plants, old ones filled with sacks, still in the water, are disturbed. On shaking